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An illustrated Historical Chronicle of

GOLD-RUSH NOME

By CARRIE M. McLAIN



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Carice M. McLain

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By

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Foreword

Carrie M. McLain arrived in Nome "on the fringe of the gold rush" in September, 1905, at the age of ten, and threw herself immediately into the bustling activities of a frontier town. This she has continued to do throughout the succeeding sixty-three years of her life, only five of which have been spent "Outside" for education and travel.

Carrie's father, William Stipek, owned a wallpaper and paint store. Her husband, Arthur T. McLain, was a miner and prospector. Before her marriage, she taught school in Teller, a thriving village north of Nome today, and in Haycock, which can muster a population of only seven at this writing. After the death of her husband in 1940, she became city clerk of Nome, a position she held until her retirement in 1957.

It is natural that Carrie, with her remarkable memory for people and events, should be Nome's official historian and one of the founders of Nome's new museum. Years ago she began collecting early-day photographs, which she unselfishly lends to writers, illustrators, and teachers. Visitors in Nome also have the pleasure of looking at this collection and eating home-baked bread or cookies in her historical house on Belmont Point.

I have been the recipient of Carrie's hospitality several times in the course of anthropological research, and my room on the second floor of her house looks out onto the grand sight of Sledge Island, where Europeans first set foot in the Nome area. In 1778, Captain James Cook named the island after a handsome Eskimo-built sled lying in the deserted village. The inhabitants, who were nowhere about, probably were trading or fishing on the mainland, perhaps on the Snake River, which flows past Carrie's house.

Only a small Eskimo fishing camp was situated where miners chose to build their town called Nome, but a fairly large village snuggled on the slopes of Cape Nome, only thirteen miles away. The villages on Sledge Island (Ayak) and Cape Nome (Ayasayuk) no longer exist. Neither does old Nome with its nineteenth-century buildings lining the narrow streets like canyon walls. Many fires have swept through the town, but that of 1934 changed its face forever, and gold rush Nome is but a memory to a few old timers like Carrie McLain.

Dorothy Jean Ray
Port Townsend, Washington
October, 1968

Chapter One

There are few places in the world today as well known as the town of Nome, Alaska, on the shores of Bering Sea. It once was a metropolis of thousands of miners and prospectors, but now it is a village of 2500 Eskimos, mixed bloods, and a few whites. For nearly 65 years gold mining kept the town alive; now it is turning to the tourist trade as an important industry.

Cape Nome, thirteen miles east of Nome was called Point Tolstoi as early as 1842. Its present name, Nome, probably came from a blank space with a question mark on the British Admiralty maps in the 1850s. Later, a draftsman, seeing the omission, placed the word, "Name," after the question mark. Still later, a draftsman thought that the question mark was a C for Cape and mistook "name" for Nome.

Gold was discovered in July, 1898, on Anvil Creek, behind Nome, but not until the summer of 1899 did boats bring prospectors to Nome. That summer, several boats would arrive in one day to discharge their human cargo with their possessions, and boat freight upon the beach at the water's edge. Steamships, or "old tubs," as they were more commonly called, were pressed into service and carried more than their capacity loads of passengers, freight, and livestock. Many times these varied boats bound for Nome tied up at Dutch Harbor to wait favorable ice conditions in the Bering Sea. Once, five, or six steamships with over 5000 passengers were held at Dutch Harbor for a week, and one old timer told me in 1930, "You never saw a more frenzied bunch of men, impatient to get to Nome to get their crack at all this gold that could be picked up for the asking in them thar hills." In 1966, another person told me how much she enjoyed the beautiful weather that June, as well as the foot-high purple violets all over the hills at Dutch Harbor.

Once the ships got to Nome, cargo had to be transferred from the ships to shore. An eye witness said that goods were piled as high as a two-story house all along the waterfront of Nome for a distance of two miles. Everyone scrambled to find his own belongings that had come from Seattle at eighty dollars a ton. Sometimes the freight had been damaged by the wet sand, or had been stolen. It was an effort to find a spot to pitch a tent among the thousands of tents; to get provisions under cover; and just to prepare a simple meal. The beach was described as a veritable ant hill of activity. Shops and restaurants were housed in large tents, and a person ate what was offered; there was no choice in a menu.

In one week of July 1897, the arrival of the ships, *Portland*, in Seattle with two tons of gold, and the *Excelsior*, in San Francisco with many thousands of pounds from the Canadian Klondike, had created a gold rush before the Nome discoveries. But news of the strike on Anvil Creek reached Dawson in the Klondike by way of St. Michael, and by March and April of 1899 almost every man had headed for Nome over the winter trail—some by dog team, some by boat, and some even by bicycle. So great was the number coming down the Yukon River, it was said, that the campfires along the banks were never out. Some reports said that more than 1800 men made the 2000-mile trip to Nome, but others said that there were many times that number.

By 1899 a small contingent of men had formed a temporary military post called Camp Anvil on Barracks Square in the middle of town. In April 1900 a military post named Fort Davis was established on the coast a little more than three miles east of town. It was named after Jefferson C. Davis, general of the Union troops stationed in Alaska when it was transferred from Russia to the United States in 1867.

Tents sprang up both in the town proper and along the beach, and on the banks of Snake River and Bourbon and Dry creeks. By 1900 thousands of people had come, and were housed in tents while wooden construction got fast underway. Tar paper shacks dotted the back streets. To save the prospectors' time, butcher, grocery, and bakery wagons plied up and down the beach, selling their goods to the hundreds of tents in the thirty-mile stretch. This was a boon to the miners when every day of open season had to count. They kept their meat and butter fresh by digging down to frost near their tents

and placing planks and canvas over the top. Loose dogs were always a problem, and I remember my father telling about a dog running down the beach with a skillet handle in his mouth, the smoking bacon in the pan, which he had skillfully snatched off a camp stove in one of the tents. It was all that a human being could do to feed himself, particularly when the dogs soon learned to become topnotch thieves.

Sanitation was a great problem in these first months. Large bath houses charged fifty cents a bath, and several public outhouses charged ten or twenty-five cents for each attendance.

Had it not been for a Golovin Eskimo's report of gold being found on the beach at Sinrock, 25 miles west of Nome, the Anvil Creek discovery may not have been made as early as July 1898 by what were called the three "Lucky Swedes," Jafet Lindeberg, Eric Lindblom, and John Brynteson. A storm had forced them ashore on the Sandspit at the mouth of the Snake River while they were making a trip up the coast to verify the Sinrock discovery. They, along with H. L. Blake and N. O. Hultberg, the Swedish missionary of Golovin, were in the group. Credit for the strike on Anvil, however, has been given to the Lucky Swedes who staked claims not only on Anvil Creek, but also on Snow Gulch and Glacier Gulch. John Dexter, the trader at Golovin, also told them about gold on what was later named Dexter Creek, ten miles north of Nome. These finds made millionaires of the three Swedes.

The Anvil Creek claims were phenomenally rich with more than a million dollars taken from one or more claims. Because good roads were few, and the spongy tundra was hazardous for hauling heavy equipment to the Anvil Creek claims, C. D. Lane, with Dr. J. Dennis Arnold as financial backer, built the Wild Goose Railroad to Anvil Creek, a distance of four miles at a cost of \$5,000 a mile. Additions to the railroad were made until it reached Lane's Landing, about eighty-five miles into the Kougarak area. The railroad no longer exists; the track has been sold by the state of Alaska and shipped to the lower forty-eight states. A gravel road now takes its place. This railroad proved a boon in the early years of Nome, affording pleasure to women and children on berry-picking excursions as well as for the miners getting to their rich ground.

Gold was discovered on the Nome beach a little after it was discovered on Anvil Creek, and was responsible for the

great influx of gold seekers. Ground could not be staked on the beach, but a prospector had the privilege of pitching his tent and mining the ground ahead of it to the water's edge, or for the length of a shovel, one commonly called a "No. 2." The first beach gold was mined in 1899 from bedrock six to ten feet below the surface and washed out with sluice boxes. In 1900 fine "flour gold" was extracted from black sand by long toms, surf washers, and rockers. About 8000 men used these brightly colored rockers, and from offshore they looked like butter and cheese machines at an old-fashioned county fair. A popular expression was that everybody had a squatter's right, and once his bit of ground was worked out, he could move on and find another spot in this thirty miles of beach extending from Cape Nome, 13 miles east of Nome to Cape Rodney, 16 miles west of Nome. But the heaviest concentration of tents was on the richest ground, which was in the area behind town, and on the stretch from the Sandspit on the Snake River to Jessie Creek and Cripple River, ten miles west of town. It was this long beach of miners that lent romance to the word, "Nome," since not another beach in the whole of Alaska or in the world was giving the squatter the opportunity to make a living off the beach at the "throw of a hat," as was said.

Many thousands looked for the sometimes elusive wealth on the creeks and on the beach either for themselves or for companies for which they worked. Some fanned off to other parts of Seward Peninsula, making discoveries at Council, Solomon, Candle, Teller, and the Kougarak.

In the early years there were two ditch companies, the Miocene and the Champion. These ditches carried water all the way from the Sawtooth Mountains, about forty miles north of Nome. The water was rented to mining companies and other outfits in the path of the ditches for sluicing winter dumps and summer diggings. A rainy season was essential for all mining.

Winter found stampede parties going to the Kuskokwim River, to the Arctic, to Norton Sound, and to the Kougarak, but little prospecting was done. There was a lot of locating of claims and waiting for summertime to prospect some more.

A prospector on the beach generally had a partner who would scrape up the goldbearing sands and bring them down to the long tom, usually located at the water's edge, and dump

them into the hopper, while the other man would "splash," using a large can or bucket nailed to a stick, which he would dip into the sea or the river and wash down the sand as it passed over a silver plate covered with mercury. The gold remained and formed an amalgam in the mercury. The amalgam would be scraped off the silver plate after the day's work was done and then put into a retort to separate at a convenient time, or burnt off in the open. A lump of gold would be left.

Although a large amount of machinery was brought into the country, much had to be abandoned. One enterprising miner, who brought equipment all the way from Boston, said that they would have been ahead of the game if they had hired men with plenty elbow grease and a "No. 2." Beach miners made from five dollars to a hundred dollars a day, and though the gold assayed at only sixteen and seventeen dollars an ounce and was not as valuable as creek gold because of its impurities, about \$2,000,000 was taken off the beach in the first two seasons' work. It is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of the amount taken because many a prospector and his poke of gold left for the States without having made an accounting of the findings.

Chapter Two

It was said that one third of the gold seekers who drifted to Nome were gamblers, one third were lazy and ne'er-do-wells, and one third were miners and prospectors. In August 1900, the Grand Jury ordered immoral women and persons without means of making a living to leave town.

Crime was rampant at first, but Nome was regarded as a fairly respectable camp despite the kind of men foisted on the town. The choicest criminals came from the States at the opening of navigation. People were afraid at night of "foot pads" or thieves. Every night someone was held up or a tent was robbed. There were no street lights in 1900, but saloons and other establishments had their own big lights in front of their places, and it was said that the law enforcing officers hung around Front Street with its street lights in preference to the unprotected back streets.

Once, burglars carried a heavy safe from the Wintermantle Store. It was later found broken on the beach with \$1200.00

gone. When Wintermantle informed the marshal's office, he was told that the office did no business at night.

There was so much lawlessness—(crimes were committed every night) and only one crime in ten atoned by punishment—that it was decided that absolute martial law was best for Nome since the marshal's office could not cope with the situation. In 1899, a Consent form of local government was decided upon by the miners and the prospectors, and T. D. Cashell was elected mayor by their consent. Alonzo Rawson was selected as police chief, and George Shumaker, fire chief. Mr. Shumaker claimed that there were more fires in Nome than in any other place on the North American continent for its size.

The women of the red light district were forever scraping. That is not to be wondered at for it was rumored between one hundred and two hundred women were brought from Europe in "white slavery," and placed in the "row," or as commonly expressed, "behind the fence." This district lay between Lanes Way and Division behind the saloons on north Front Street. Because of the many women in the restricted district, it was thought in the States that only women of ill repute existed in Nome. Many of these women, however, had been unhappy with their original surroundings, and wanted to escape. They did not know where they were being taken. Later, many married business men and became reputable citizens of the community. The town took on a better name as the town lost some of its gold rush look, and prospectors sent for their families.

My sisters and brother and I had been in Nome just nine days when a big fire occurred in the red light district on September 13, 1905. About three o'clock in the morning I woke up to a heavy pounding on the door and a man yelling, "Bill, Bill, get up! The whole town is on fire!"

My father hustled into his clothes and left. From the south window in a bedroom we could see a huge fire raging out of control. Both sides of the street from Lanes Way to the City Hall and most of the restricted district were burned. The rebuilding of the saloons along the north side of Front Street, which fronted the district, was quickly underway, and one day my father said to us children, "Each of you take a gunny sack and pick up the woodchips and bring them home for kindling after school hours."

There was a high wooden fence separating the district from the residential section with openings here and there. Not knowing what red light meant, nor the significance of the fence, we walked through one of the openings and came to the row of little green houses. Over each door was the name of the occupant, Lulu, Violet, or Rose, and at each window sat one of the “girls” with her hair done in Flora Dora style, face rouged, and looking very beautiful to us youngsters. We stood there in wonderment, and the women stared at us in greater surprise. Nevertheless, we gathered up woodchips where the saloons were fast going up, retraced our steps, and went home. That evening we asked our father, “Who were those beautiful women in the little green houses?”

I can still see the smile on his face, but we were not asked again to gather woodchips.

Chapter Three

On August 23, 1900, two hundred persons gathered in Madden Hall for a meeting to incorporate the city. Judge C. S. Hannum took the chair. It was conceded that Nome needed law, order, and fire protection. Judge A. H. Noyes, the district judge, advised delay because too many businessmen were undecided about incorporation. At this meeting, the lawyer, Albert Fink, spoke of the good derived from the Consent Government in 1899, with good fire and police protection, and made a resolution that: “Judge Noyes, as soon as he consistently can, permit the people of Nome to incorporate.” From almost the first of the year, incorporation of Nome was an issue. Some businessmen were afraid of the long winters and were in doubt about the future of Nome, but realized that a city government would give stability to the camp and develop better living conditions. Some, who realized what litigation had done to close down some outfits, knew what this would do to business. However, most businessmen were optimistic for the future of Nome, and by November, 1900, plans for a municipality were being laid and joint committees were laboring on local government problems. To appraise the property, Nome was divided into six districts. At the election of April, 1901, there were to be two ballot boxes, one for or against incorporation, and one

for candidates for office—seven councilmen and three school trustees. The following were elected. For the council, J. F. Geise, G. L. (Tex) Rickard, J. B. Harris, S. H. Stevens, Jr., William McPhee, Charles Hoxsie, and W. E. Geiger. Geise was made mayor of the group. City Clerk was B. G. McGinnis; the City Treasurer was George L. Fish; the City Assessor, R. J. Watson; City Attorney, J. P. Thornton; Chief of Police, John Jolley; City Health Officer, S. J. Call. A fire chief is not mentioned, but there were sixty active volunteer firemen at that time.

The school trustees were Miner Bruce, Colin Beaton, and Dr. J. J. Chambers. Six hundred ninety-five ballots were cast for incorporation, and 188, against. Rickard, who had landed in Nome in June, 1899 and had built the Northern Saloon, was against incorporation at first because there was not enough money in camp in the closed season. He finally realized that incorporation was the only way of administering the affairs of the city. Geise had been in Alaska since 1894, coming to Nome in 1899. He built a big hardware store and the Lawrence Hotel, and possibly was the heaviest individual taxpayer in the city. He wanted the city incorporated. Charlie Hoxsie came in 1898 and pitched his tent where his Dexter Saloon stood. He believed in the future of Nome. Stevens came to Alaska in 1897 and was business manager of the newspaper, "Gold Digger." Harris went to the Klondike in 1897, came to Nome in 1899 and was proprietor of the Golden Gate Hotel. Capt. W. E. Geiger came to Nome in 1899 and built a wagon bridge across Snake River to the Sandspit, charging ten cents to cross it. There was a lot of activity on the Sandspit, and the bridge was badly needed. As soon as the bridge had paid for itself, he turned it over to the city. The bridge was destroyed during the storm and high water of 1913 and was never replaced because most of the buildings on the Spit were also destroyed.

A building known as the Bridge School stood on the Sandspit for children living there, but school was held in various buildings in what is now the main part of Nome until 1902. After Nome was incorporated, a school was built on Third and Steadman, a more central location at that time. When I was in the seventh grade in 1907, our teacher had us write letters to children in Stateside schools. I remember Judge Edward Moore's son wrote that there was more to the

selling of liquor than just selling it, because the licenses for intoxicating liquor and tobacco enabled the town to conduct its public schools. A central school building was completed in 1902-03. A parochial school also provided an education for the town's white children.

The Episcopalian Church on upper Steadman was the first church building to be completed. It was occupied in August, 1900, with Reverend C. C. Bloor, officiating. Other denominations held services in halls and buildings, and by 1901, a good-sized Congregational Church and a Catholic Church were completed. Many a prospector walking to Nome from his creek claim, especially in a late winter afternoon, or in a blizzard, relied on the steeple of the Catholic Church with its cross of electric lights shining like a beacon to guide his way.

The Methodists had a small church, later replaced by a larger one on the corner of C and Second streets. Later on, it was used by Methodist Eskimos and became known as the Eskimo Church. In the meantime, the Congregational Church building became known as the Federated Church and was shared by Methodists and Congregationalists.

Today our church buildings are among the nicest appearing buildings in town. The Protestant churches are the Lutheran, the Evangelical Covenant, the Methodist, the Assembly of God, the Baptist, and the Church of the Nazarene. Another Catholic church building supplanted the one built in 1901. All are mission churches that require some Stateside help.

Chapter Four

From the beginning of Nome there were many business and professional people. There was no scarcity of lawyers because of continual litigation over mining claims. The lawyers were some of the finest in the country. It was said that lawsuits occurred over every mining claim that proved to be a "winner." A photograph of more than twenty-four judges and lawyers in Nome at one time gives an idea of the magnitude of legal business in those gold rush years. In 1968 there were two lawyers in town.

In August 1900, a meeting was held in the Columbia Theater to protest "receivership in mining claims." Many

miners, businessmen, and military and civil officers were present, and Sam Knight, Judge Wilfred B. Hoggatt, and Captain Baldwin were nominated to go to Washington, D. C. to present the following resolution: "Resolve that we heartily advocate amending of the laws of the United States so as to prevent jumping of mining claims, or their relocation during the life of a prior valid location, thereon, etc., etc." Miners wanted to get rid of legal troubles because hardly a mine of any value escaped conflict of title, expensive litigation, and receivership.

In the early days there were many transfer companies because miners on creek claims had to have coal and supplies hauled over almost impassable roads by horses. Nome was the place where the "sourdough" in hotcakes, bread, and biscuits became the mainstay of the prospector. The prospector would take a starter on his slapjack stick from town out to his shack in the hills where he kept his sourdough bucket alive. This gave rise to the saying that a "sourdough" was a person who saw the ice come into Bering Sea in the fall and leave in the spring. The newcomer, or tenderfoot, was called a "cheechako."

Many of the little gold-rush towns on Seward Peninsula were connected by telephone. The longest line was built from Nome to Candle. A. E. Boyd was the manager of the Alaska Telephone and Telegraph Company, and if I heard rightly in those early years, the yearly income the first two years was \$99,000. (J. C. Brown, owner of the system, told me this when I was a telephone girl in 1914.)

There were two kinds of businesses in the early days, which no longer exist: butcher shops and breweries. Once there were two butcher shops with additional branches belonging to Carstens and Dashley, and Pacific Cold Storage, which were in business until 1910. Cattle and sheep were brought in on the hoof, and slaughtered not far away on Dry Creek in a makeshift slaughter house. On warm days in summer, it smelled to high heaven. Dashley's daughter, who was my age, told me that her father many times gave a handful of suet to trade pieces of old ivory and trinkets from the Eskimos who were fond of the beef fat.

Nome had a brewery on upper D Street, and was only recently dismantled. Earlier, when tents covered all of Belmont Point there was also a brewery there.

Chapter Five

The location of a post office was changed several times in those early years. People waited for their mail in a double line, often for as long as two hours in mud up to their knees. This was especially hard on businessmen who often had to pay someone to stand in line because they were too busy to collect their mail. The large amount of mail under poor working conditions was exhausting work for the clerks. General delivery was said to be the largest in the United States and the alphabet was divided into over 700 divisions. The post office was open to the public from 8:00 A.M. until midnight each weekday, with shorter hours on Sunday. Sometimes a mail boat came more than once a day.

The most regular and reliable mail service came on the boats to Nome in summertime. It was irregular at first, but eventually came every two weeks from Seattle. Winter mail service was quite a different matter. In 1900, mail came over the trail from Dawson with a letter dated November arriving the first of February. Later, mail came from Seattle by boat to Valdez in southeast Alaska, then was taken by horses and sled 400 miles to Fairbanks and sent from there by dogteam along the Yukon trail to Unalakleet on Norton Sound where sack upon sack was stored in warehouses. Once a week, 500 pounds of this mail (at first only first-class matter) were taken to Nome by dogteam. From there, mail was sent twice a month to mining camps such as Solomon, Council, Teller, York, Wales, and the Kougarek. A great debt is owed these mail carriers who had to be on the trail in all kinds of weather keeping their schedules.

In 1911 Congress passed a law to accept parcel post and second-class mail, but magazines and newspapers sometimes were not received in chronological order because sacks were piled helter-skelter on the sleds sent from the Unalakleet warehouses. The last overland winter mail of the year was in early May. Mail collected in Seattle after that was held for the little ship, *Corwin*, which generally arrived in Nome the end of May or even as late as the first week in June with tons of mail, a few passengers, and crates of oranges, lemons, grapefruit, and eggs. That was a red-letter day for Nome. The famous old revenue cutter, *Bear*, led the *Corwin* through leads in the ice to the safety of Nome. By the early 1940s

the *Corwin* was off the run and the revenue cutter brought the mail by early June. Sometimes both the *Corwin* and the *Bear* found the roadstead a solid stretch of ice, and mail and supplies were brought ashore by dogteams and even horses.

Ships had to anchor a mile out in the roadstead because of shallow water. At first passengers and merchandise alike were brought ashore on a line and tripod, and then later, a 60-foot caisson with a cable line that extended to a tower on the dock about a quarter of a mile from shore. The ice pressure finally demolished the wooden superstructure of the caisson in 1916, and merchandise was then brought from the ships in small lighterage boats. Jetties and bulkheads along the Snake River made a secure channel, which is kept free of mud and silt nowadays during the open season.

Chapter Six

There were many doctors in the community in the early days, and hospital service. A Catholic hospital on the corner of First and Steadman was still operating in 1905, and abandoned only when the Holy Cross hospital was built in 1906. This hospital was in use until 1917. A large residence building was then used by the Methodists as a hospital until a larger one was built in 1922. It burned to the ground in March, 1948. Since 1950, the present hospital under the Women's Division of Christian Service of the Methodist Church has been in constant use.

Only once did the lack of proper sanitation and water facilities result in typhoid fever and that was in 1899 when thousands were pouring into Nome. Thirteen people died. It has been said that the scarcity of typhoid was due to cold winters and cool summers, but most likely it was because of a smaller population at that time.

Pneumonia was alarmingly high among the "Cheechakos," and caused many deaths. Dr. E. E. Hill, the health doctor for the community, cautioned the people at all times about the dangers. When two sick sailors aboard a north-bound whaling vessel were dropped in Nome in 1900, the red measles struck the Eskimos up and down the coast, decimating them, and creating a hardship for the missionaries who looked after them.

There were many drownings from sudden and squally weather on shallow Bering Sea, and the little Mosquito Fleet often found its doom on the beach.

The influenza of 1918 struck with great disaster this part of Alaska. Old Dad Williams, who had left Nome on the next to the last trip of the *Victoria*, was one of the first to contract the 1918 flu on his trip “outside.” He had sold all his ivory cribbage boards and trinkets aboard ship, and returned to Nome for more ivory. He likely helped bring the flu to Nome, and he, as well as five others, never reached Seattle alive on the final trip of the *Victoria*. What a scourge it was to strike Nome, with only the Bureau of Education doctor, Daniel Neuman, and Dr. Charles Burson at Fort Davis to care for everyone: soldiers, civilians, and Eskimos. The Holy Cross Hospital had closed its doors the year before, and only the small Methodist hospital was open. The flu spread so widely that there were more sick than well persons in town and along the coast. The city was granted permission to reopen the Holy Cross Hospital so that the few well ones could nurse the sick. In November, 1918, several white persons and more than 100 Eskimos died. Never before or after had the weather registered such a low temperature—fifty-one below zero—or had there been so little snow to bank the houses against the wind. There were no sulpha medicines then, so naturally, there were dozens of cures floating about. The Eskimos did not understand about nursing their high fevers, and ran outdoors to get cool. Soon they were dead. It was the same story in the outlying villages; few escaped. Some realized that flu could be prevented only by allowing no one to leave or to enter the village. Not until the sick men in the Nome marshal’s office were well, and could drive by dog team to ascertain conditions in the villages did they discover how many had died. It was not a pleasant experience.

Chapter Seven

Those who came to Nome unprepared to meet the rigors of the country and its living conditions were out of luck. No one could afford to shoulder another’s troubles along with his own. Several plucky women made their way to this gold rush, and old Mother Tiffany claimed that she was the first white woman to set foot on Nome soil in 1899.

However, as boats arrived only hours apart, other women came ashore. Louise Forsythe Walsh, now at the Pioneer Home in Sitka, also arrived with her parents in 1899. Her half brother, born on January 1, 1900, was the first white child born in Nome.

Almost every nationality was represented in Nome, but the Scandinavians predominated. Nome had many big organizations such as the Eagles, Masons, Oddfellows, Moose, and Pioneers, and their auxiliaries. Also, every nationality had its own club. The Sons of the North had a fine hall for their dances and card parties and a sixty-foot ski jump on the brow of Dry Creek hill. The Irish had their "Sons of Erin Club" and the Scottish people never failed to have "Comin' Through the Rye" played at dances.

Winter was a sociable time; summer was work time. The Miners' Home Club was organized for weekly card parties. Dances were annual affairs of the big organizations, which also had many other functions. Surprise parties were given at the drop of a hat, and one never knew when a knock on the door in the evening meant a surprise birthday party or a basket of goodies for a big feed. The phonograph was played for entertainment. The women met at various homes to make paper flowers for all occasions, including funerals. Roses, lilies, carnations, and chrysanthemums were favorites. When the Pioneers of Alaska Igloo No. 1 gave their annual Roof Garden in 1912, the auxiliary made hundreds of paper roses. Wires were strung from the center of the chandelier in Eagle Hall and the roses strung on black thread spaced along the wires. It looked as if there was a shower of roses. It was the talk of the town.

Nome was isolated in the winter, so home talent was depended upon. Many light operas were enjoyed. In 1906 Miss Longacre presented the Mikado, and Henry Petersen put on many of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. In 1907 the Ladies Guild of the Episcopalian Church presented Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" with nearly every school child in the cast. The Guild made all of the costumes, and I can remember nothing so lovely before or since. In those years, Nome had a dancing master, Mr. Goermer, who held classes for fancy and ballroom dancing every Friday evening. At the end of May he would put on an exhibition of fancy dancing that had been learned that winter.

In the summertime, visiting stock companies held shows every night for weeks at a time, but they complained if they did not play to full houses every night. They forgot that there was not the turnover of people as would be found in a larger place. Summertime was work time, especially when gold mining needed every day of the open season to operate. Nome's first opera, "The Little Hussar" with Emma Steiner and Lillian Starr, called the Swedish Nightingale, appeared at the Eldorado nightly.

Summer also brought politicians by boat. Women and children had their summer picnics and salmon fishing and blueberry picking sprees. Many tried to beautify their yards. There were not many cars before 1917, and then for many years one could count them on the fingers of one hand. But we had riding horses in the early years and launches for short trips up and down the coast.

There were few Eskimos in gold-rush Nome, but some came from nearby coastal villages during the summer. The early day Eskimo shaved the crown of his head, leaving a rim of black hair that reminded one of today's Beatles. Though he wore white man's clothing in the summer, he still had not mastered the fit, so style was the least of his concern. In those days the Eskimos bartered ivory cribbage boards, fur mats, duck feather cushions, and miniature skin oomiaks and kayaks. They also peddled ducks, geese, and cranes in the spring, and fish and berries in the summer. They were not yet employed as laborers in the white man's world. The phonograph impressed them, and how they enjoyed carrying a small one around and listening to the screechy, squeaky music. In the early days, very few Eskimos remained in Nome during the winter months. Those who came in the summer in their oomiaks with a favorable west wind were mainly from Shishmaref, Cape Prince of Wales, and King and Diomed islands. They pitched their tents on the beach near the mouth of Snake River or at the upper end of the Sandspit, picking berries and drying salmon to take back home, and selling their knickknacks. By fall, they returned to their homes under their own power, but later on, the revenue cutter took them and their boats and baggage back to the islands. Still later, the Bureau of Indian Affairs boat, *Boxer*, took over this service, and then, the *North Star*.

Chapter Eight

Nome has been a focal point for Seward Peninsula and Northwestern Alaska since the gold rush and still remains the "Gateway to the Arctic," though in time Kotzebue and Barrow might surpass it in size and economy. Nome's southern position, however, makes it more accessible by boat. When fur pelts still commanded high prices, Nome was the center for equipping trading and exploring vessels that traded along the Arctic, Siberian, and American coasts.

Many persons contributed to the fame of Nome. Roald Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer, used Nome for his base when he journeyed into the Arctic regions and to the North Pole. The dirigible, *Norge*, in its homeward flight over the North Pole was dismantled at Teller in May 1926, and Amundsen and his Norwegian crew, and Umberto Nobile, who constructed the dirigible and his Italian crew left Nome that June. An interview with Amundsen in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* revealed that Mrs. Alma Niebling, who ran a restaurant in Nome, made the finest Spanish egg omelet that he had ever eaten. Nome women wondered greatly about that, because they realized how strong cold storage eggs could get by springtime. No planes flew to Nome with fresh eggs at that time.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson left Nome twice around 1913 for the Arctic to prove that the use of fresh meat and fish could prevent scurvy. Many lives could have been saved in gold-rush Dawson and Nome if the white man had had the wisdom of the Eskimo to eat fresh seal and walrus meat, and leave beans, canned meats, flour, and baking powder alone.

Mikkelsen was another intrepid explorer in 1908 and 1909 who told us school children of the hardships of his Arctic explorations. What I best remember was his telling us about the frozen sleeping bags that the men had to climb into at night. Not until early morning did they thaw out enough for comfortable sleeping; then they were dampened again by perspiration.

Boys my age who spent their childhood in Nome learned early how to make a living and to help their hardworking fathers take a gamble on the gold-bearing ground. One was Jimmy Doolittle, the World War II hero, who sold papers and delivered hand laundry for his mother. Herbert Munter, whose

parents left Nome in 1907, became Boeing's first test pilot in Seattle. His little brother, Franklin, at age five, had a sweet piping voice, and sang the latest songs of the 1900s in all the Nome saloons while selling bags of popcorn that his mother made.

In 1906, Hoagy Carmichael and his father were in Nome. Hoagy played the piano, and his father, the violin, in the Northern Saloon. Hoagy was called the "boy wonder," a prophetic phrase, as he became a well-known musician. Then, there was the poetry of Esther Birdsall Darling. Much of it related to the racing dogs in the All-Alaska Sweepstake races. Her poem, the "Alaska For-get-me-not" (the State flower) stands with Marie Drake's "Alaska Flag" in Alaska's Hall of Memory.

W. Harrison Loerpabel, at the age of eight in 1900, sold his mother's bread and pies to the beach miners and was paid in gold. Harrison's mother had brought a good kitchen range and utensils to a home his father built close to the beach. The mother's bread and pastry proved a boon to the family.

Chapter Nine

Steamships often had the misfortune to get detained in the sea ice. The *Nome City* was in the ice off St. Lawrence Island for thirty days in May and June, 1900. The *Jeannie* was also in the ice about the same time with a capacity load of 900 passengers.

In June, 1900, late ice conditions in Bering Sea and the Nome roadstead kept five or more steamships tied up at Dutch Harbor with some 5000 passengers aboard. However, the *Ohio* was a boat with a real story of being late in the ice. She had left Seattle on June 1, 1908 with about 850 passengers for Nome. The *Victoria* left the next day and reached Nome on schedule in ten days. The *Victoria* had had her bow framed with steel so that she could buck the ice and get through the vast ice fields, but when the *Ohio* got into one of these fields she had to go along with the ice since her bow was not fitted for the ice. My eighth grade teacher, who was aboard, told us pupils all about it. Food was getting low and they were getting down to beans and hardtack. There was a rumor that one of the cabin boys had started over the

ice for Nome, but if he did, Nome never saw him. When the *Ohio* dropped anchor in Nome on July 10, forty days after starting out, almost all of Nome was on the beach when the passengers came ashore. I still retain a picture from my childhood of some pretty dejected looking men and women. This episode of the ill-fated *Ohio* spurred Congress to pass a bill stating that no steamship could carry more passengers than there were life preservers and life boats, which in this case, was 450.

Nome was beset so much of the time by either storm or high water that the few remaining old-timers today marvel that any of old Nome still remains. When a storm hit in July, 1899, an eye witness claimed that tents were torn down by the waves, and that bed clothes, trunks, foodstuff, and utensils were tossed about in confusion.

When the August and September 1900 storms came along, havoc was wrought with great loss of lumber and tons and tons of coal and freight that had been left on the waterfront. Many places of business along River Street and south Front Street were wrecked. Many boats were tossed about and the barge, "Skookum," was torn and shattered of all her loose timbers. She had brought up thousands of board feet of lumber, hundreds of tons of coal, and several hundred head of livestock and sheep. Pumps, engines, and other machinery worth thousands of dollars were buried in the sand. A missionary from Teller came down after the storm and said that here would be a ham half buried in the sand, and there would be a woman's corset protruding from a suitcase. Gold seekers along the beach lost their meager belongings and tents. The washing away of so many tents was a boost for the lodging houses in town, but some of the prospectors were later shipped out by the government on what was called the "blue ticket," reserved for the destitute and mentally ill.

The storm of 1913 was as great as that of 1900 and homes on the Sandspit and in the east end of town were hard hit. So were business places all along south Front Street. The storm began on October 3 and lasted three days. Someone counted thirteen cabins and eleven pianos that had been washed off the Sandspit into the Snake River. Emma Dahlquist and her husband, who ran the Safety Roadhouse, twenty-two miles from Nome, had a harrowing experience. Mrs. Dahlquist said that the waves swept over the spit and

the water rose in the roadhouse, so she climbed up onto the roof, taking her canary birds and dogs. She sat astride the roof one whole night, expecting the roadhouse to be swept into the lagoon at any moment, but it still stands on the spit between the sea and Safety Lagoon.

The *Victoria* had one more trip to Nome that fall, and many old-timers whose cabins had washed away or had been filled with sand and gravel to the roof left for the States. This was a terrible economic blow to old Nome.

Chapter Ten

Dogs were invaluable for many things: for carrying water, which was sold by the bucketful; for packing freight stacked on the beach; and for bringing driftwood on the beach for prospectors' shacks and Eskimo tents. The dog was also a valuable animal for winter transportation over staked trails. Travel would have been nigh impossible without him since horses were a luxury, and summer and winter roads were rare. Everybody owned one or more work dogs, which were staked out in the back yard; and many and loud were the howls. If a person were to ask me what were the two most memorable things about Nome I would say gold mining and the "Malemute chorus." On September 14, 1900, there were sixty-seven dogs in the dog pound for sale. These dogs, so necessary to the town's economy, were sold for \$50, and a good lead dog for \$75 to \$100.

Dog racing did not begin in earnest until 1908 when the Nome Kennel Club was formed by professional and businessmen, dog owners, and dog drivers, although short dog races had been held in Nome throughout the winter months, mostly on the coast to villages or smaller mining centers. The Kennel Club's first big race was the 408 miles to Candle and return in the first week of April, 1908. The race course followed the telephone line so people could keep track of their favorites. A dozen teams left the "scratch" with Dr. E. E. Hill starting them off. "Doc," as he was called, was one of Nome's most civic-minded citizens as well as an outstanding physician, who remained in Nome until his death in 1912. These races had such a hold on the people each spring that between the excitement of the races and the resulting gambling, the town was in a frenzy with "dog dope" for three to four days. As

early as November, dog drivers began training both themselves and the dogs. During the last three weeks before the race they fed the dogs raw eggs and mutton chops. Most of the teams had camp followers who set up camp for their team and driver. This gave the drivers a chance to rest, and the camp followers to rub the dogs' legs since the animals were of the greatest importance. Twelve teams entered that first race. John Hegness, driving the team of Albert Fink, the lawyer, took first place and a purse of \$10,000. The time made was around 105 hours, and though it was not exceptional, it proved that the All-Alaska Sweepstake races were here to stay; at least, as long as Nome could afford them.

One of the "characters" of dog racing was Fox Maule Ramsay of Scottish nobility. He was a real sportsman, who tried his hand at dog racing as a Cheechako not yet accustomed to the roadhouses. In his first race, upon reaching Solomon, about thirty-six miles from Nome, he called for his bawth, toast and marmalade, and tea about 4 P.M. His call for a bawth electrified all Nome and endeared him, stutter and all, to the dog-loving public. But he soon learned that a bunk behind a cannon ball stove (a large round heating stove) and a good tight barn for his team were the height of comfort and safety.

Dogs of all types were raced in those days, and after seeing a Russian trader named Goosak, successfully race the little Siberian huskies in the next year's race, Fox Ramsay brought seventy of them from Siberia. He entered three teams in the Sweepstakes race of 1910. John Johnson, a Finlander, won first place with one of these teams, making the fastest time of 74 hours, 37 minutes, and 14 seconds, a record that still holds. Fox Ramsay, himself, came in second, and was hailed as one of the big racers, to be honored and no longer laughed at. During the decade of these races there were no more intrepid dog mushers than Scotty Allan, Percy Blatchford, Faye Delezene, and Leonhard Seppala. Seppala won the last three races, and was the only racer to win fame later in other races in Alaska, northern United States, and Canada.

What a help, plane travel in the wintertime would have been to the gold seekers in those early 1900s. The records show that Dr. W. T. Baum perished February 1, 1901, on the trail above the Tubutulik River on his way to the Council country, and a Dr. Tam froze to death at Teller. Both doctors were

probably on deeds of mercy to those gold camps. People who had gone to Teller when a stampede occurred at Gold Run on the Bluestone, eighteen miles inland, and remained in Teller for the winter, would often cross, poorly clothed, to Port Clarence on the ice to get beach wood. If caught in a blizzard they would perish.

Emma Dahlquist decided to walk seven miles from their Safety Roadhouse to Cape Nome to visit Miss Hogan in March, 1914. She had on mukluk slippers and a calico dress under her fur parka, but a blinding blizzard arose. After a short time, Mr. Dahlquist phoned Cape Nome to learn that Emma had not yet arrived. Nome dog drivers were alerted, but after finding no clue of her on the trail decided to hunt farther afield the next day. One of Scotty Allan's dogs sniffed at a mukluk slipper and soon Emma was found under a little bush, frozen to death with tears frozen on her cheeks. She had lost her way in the blizzard and had sought shelter under a scraggly bush in that treeless area.

On January 9, 1921, near Teller, an old timer and his dog team were separated from an Eskimo team on the divide before dropping into Grantley Harbor. It was twilight and flying snow obscured what visibility remained. He left his team to find the trail, but instead of heading for Teller, he followed the trail stakes that went to the head of the harbor. He was found the next day about ten miles from Teller. It has been said that the victim of freezing becomes very warm before finally being overcome with drowsiness. In his case, his fur mittens were still tied behind his back and his hands were bare, though a bitter wind was blowing in below zero weather.

Chapter Eleven

One never knows what turn luck can take, especially in the gold mining game. Such a series of turns followed J. C. Brown in 1904. His determination to sink one last hole after his wife begged him to stop brought him millions of dollars in two years' time. He had been working for the city and his wife wanted him to leave Nome while he still had some savings left, but that last hole struck the Third Beach Line and made him rich. It was said that Mrs. Brown helped her husband sink some of the holes to bedrock. She

was on the windlass while he grubbed in the shaft, getting down to bedrock.

The big find on Anvil Creek in 1898 was already ancient history, and this followup in 1904 gave new impetus to the camp and made Nome a more permanent village. The rich gold strikes made near Solomon, Council, Candle, and Teller by prospectors who fanned out from Nome were a help to Nome's economy, the focal point for transportation and communications as long as gold mining held out. Though the tourist trade is taking over from mining as the important industry, it is still hopeful that another mineral—oil—may possibly give new life to Nome.

Living in Nome in the early days was a difficult life, and it still is not easy. Someone has said that "we were a country of waits and chores," which has proved to be true many times. Times are changing, though. Now cargo planes bring more and more goods to Nome, and one wonders how much longer boats will bring freight. Years ago, merchants had to provide food and merchandise for an eight-month period from October to June. Now, an order can be brought overnight from Anchorage or Seattle. Only a generation ago passengers could come by boat only in the spring, and had to leave by October unless they took a rare and expensive dog team ride halfway across the State. Now, relatives and friends of Nomeites sometimes fly from Seattle for just an overnight stay. The gold-rush days are a long way away. Gone are the dog teams and horses with tinkling bells on their harnesses, the musical sounds ringing out in the crisp, subzero winter. The cold weather, too, frosted the horses' nostrils and whitened their manes, making them ghostly apparitions of the streets.

Cars, trucks, and snowmobiles have replaced the dogs and the horses. The romance of those old days is gone forever, and as I sit at my window, looking up and down the beach, I see in my mind's eye the thousands of men who toiled on the beach for gold, making the word, NOME, famous round the world.



Photographs
from the
author's collection
and from the
Nome Historical
Museum.





Miners' tents on the sandspit in 1899 and 1900.



Tent stores along Front Street in 1899.



Congested Front Street in Nome in 1900.



Scene on Nome Beach in June, 1900. *Adney photograph*



Cape Nome and driftwood.



Long toms on the beach used in mining the gold from the sand.



Sheep shipped to Nome for butchering in early 1900's. *B. B. Dobbs photograph*



Prospectors boarding the barge taken to steamer leaving for Seattle.



The first passenger train leaving Anvil for Nome on the "Wild Goose R.R.," July 19, 1900. *F. H. Nowell photograph*



Bridge over Snake River, Nome.



Lightering off boats and the dock at Nome.



Landing passengers in 1903.



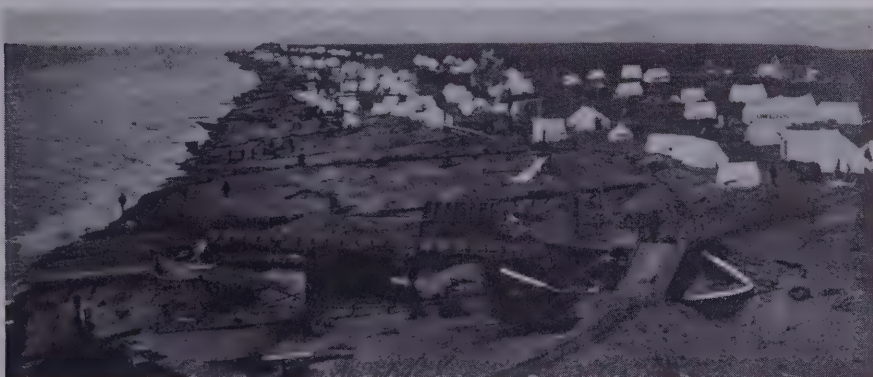
Julia Brevig and a Finn panning on the beach in 1900.



Hydraulic mining followed hand mining. *B. B. Dobbs photograph*



Over a million dollars was taken out of No. 5 Anvil Creek in early years. Miners shoveled into sluice box.



Reach miners and their tents, extending along the beach for a distance of thirty miles. *Miles photograph*



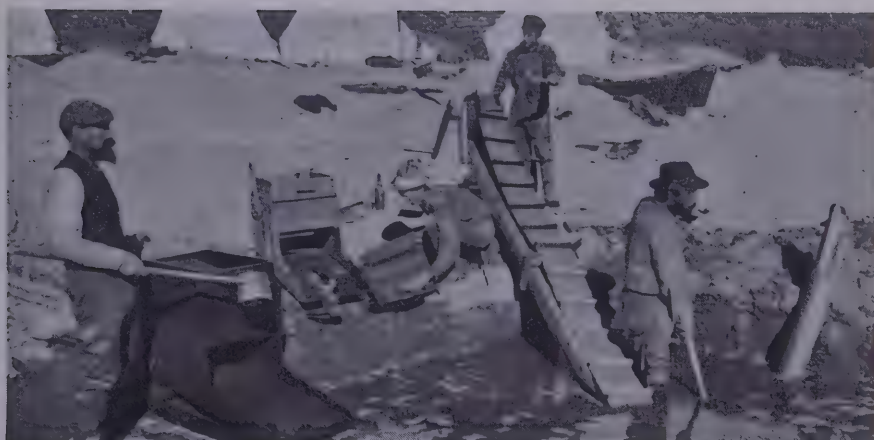
Pay dumps taken out in winter on Little Creek. *F. H. Nowell photograph*



Eugene Chilberg and Jafet Lindeberg with gold pokes in 1906. *B. B. Dobbs photograph*



Anvil Creek gold in pan worth \$1,500.00. *C. S. Glavinovich photograph*



Rocking on the beach.



The arrival of the mail. Winter 1904.



Berry pickers on excursion ride.



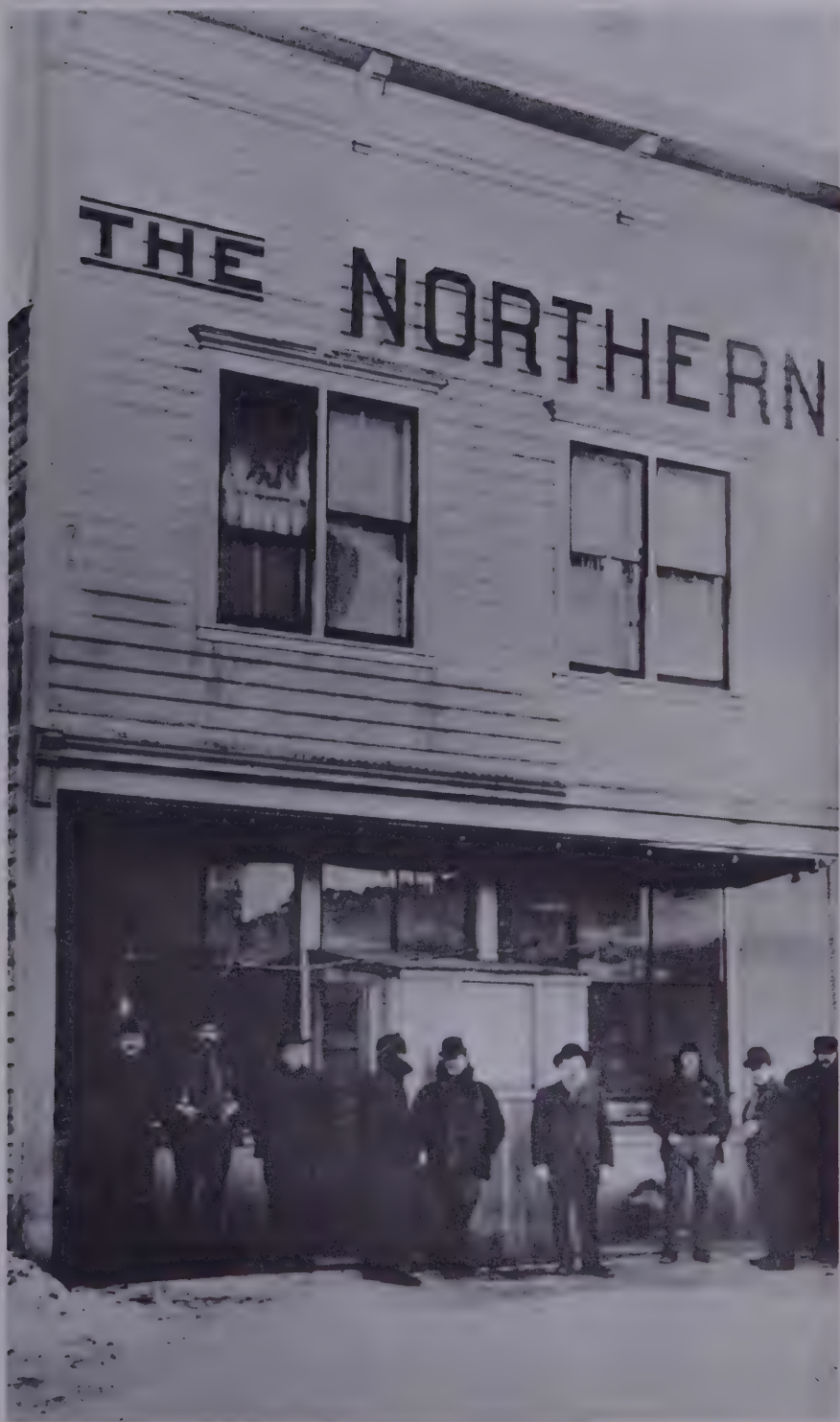
Steamers waiting at Dutch Harbor for ice to break up in Bering Sea, May, 1900.
Lomen Bros. photograph



Passengers arriving at Nome, June, 1900.



These two buildings constituted the first Post Office in Nome.



The Northern Saloon with Tex Rickard, a partner, standing third from left.



Telephone office in 1906. *F. H. Nowell photograph*



Telephone switchboard in 1905. *F. H. Nowell photograph*



Former Holy Cross Hospital and Catholic Church. Hospital built in 1906, church in 1901



Front Street in winter long before 1934 fire.



A home readied for a wedding in 1909.



Kegoyah Kozga Literary Society in 1903.



First Nome City Council in April, 1901.



Carstens Brothers and Dashley Butcher Shop.



Ely Nicholi—The Scavenger or "Honey Bucket" man, as he was known in those days.



Nome school children in front of Bridge School on sandspit 1903-4.

Franklin Munter with bags of popcorn he sold at the Saloons and where he sang for the miners.



Willow Pattern Plate Chorus. 8th grade commencement in 1909. *Lomen Bros.* photograph



First school in Nome—1901-1902.



Nome Public School about 1910-12.
H. G. Kaiser photograph



Nome students on ice pressure ridge on
Bering Sea. *Lomen Bros. photograph.*



Bar Association of Nome, Alaska in 1910. *Lomen Bros. photograph*



An Eskimo toddler in typical native costume. *Elmer Reed photograph*



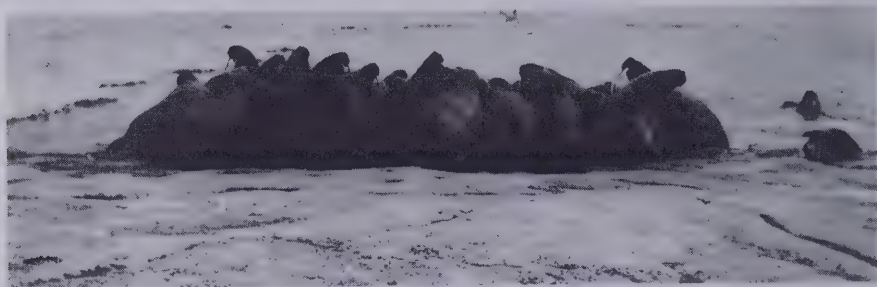
Early Eskimo beauty in her fur parka, long before 1918 flu epidemic. *B. B. Dobbs photograph*



Eskimo madonna in early days. *B. B. Dobbs photograph*



Eskimo posing as he is ready to harpoon a seal. *Lomen Bros. photograph*



Herd of walrus on Bering Sea ice.



Eskimo hunters dressing a walrus. *C. Madsen photograph*



Large oomiaks and natives. *B. B. Dobbs photograph*



Eskimos in their kayaks. *H. G. Kaiser photograph*



Eskimos pose in one of Nome's first automobiles in 1905. *F. H. Nowell photograph*



Large herd of reindeer and herder in northwest Alaska about 1915.



Early day Eskimos dancing on the beach.



Eskimos listening to a phonograph for the first time.



Eskimo woman in a blanket toss.



Horses buried in mud showing many tents across river.



W. J. Rowe, Nome transfer man moving dredge with many head of horses.



Nome after big fire in September 1905. Goetze photograph



S.S. Senator in the ice. *F. H. Nowell photograph*



S. S. Corwin in the Nome Roadstead with cargo hauled by dog team to Nome—a distance of nearly one mile. *H. G. Kaiser photograph*



Nome delegation en route, REINDEER FAIR, IGLOO, ALASKA, 1917. Lomen Bros. photograph



Lapps with sled reindeer at the time Sheldon Jackson had deer brought into country for developing industry for the Eskimos.



Frank Kleinschmidt, big game hunter of walrus and polar bear in early years.



John A. Wilson photograph



Lomen Bros. photograph



John A. Wilson photograph



U. S. Army's Black Wolf Squadron flew to Nome in August of 1920 and landed on beach at abandoned Fort Davis three miles east of Nome. Three or four open cockpit planes made the trip.

General Nelson, arms folded in photo, visited Nome in August, 1967 for the first time in 47 years to speak at the Chamber of Commerce and tell about his trip of years before.

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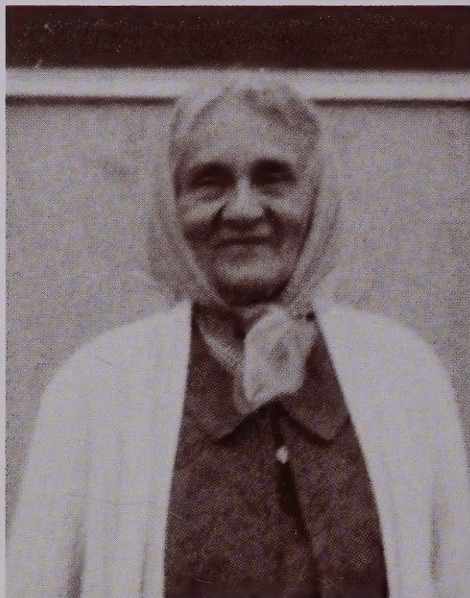
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About The Author

Carrie M. McLain was born in 1895 in Astoria, L.I., New York. Mrs. McLain, along with four other children, moved to Nome with their father in 1905. Mrs. McLain was married in 1923 and reared a family of one son and three daughters. She was widowed in 1940 and at that time began a 14 year tenure as Nome's City Clerk. Mrs. McLain has spent 64 years in Alaska, 59 of them on the Seward Peninsula mostly in Nome.